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Food Stamps: First Line Defense Against Hunger

The Food Stamp Program is the country's first line defense against hunger. A six-page article takes a look at today's program: who it's reaching, what's being done to improve management, and how special provisions protect the elderly and disabled. **Page 2**



Food Stamps Make A Difference

Four food stamp participants talk about getting food help. While their circumstances and backgrounds differ, they share some common feelings about applying for and using food stamps. **Page 8**



Operation Awareness

Safeguarding food stamp dollars is the theme of a new national campaign called Operation Awareness. The campaign is helping states work together on reducing food stamp losses caused by fraud, abuse, or error. **Page 12**

Making Food Dollars Count \$ \$ \$ \$ \$

USDA is sponsoring a series of workshops for community workers, nutrition educators, and others interested in helping families—particularly low-income families—get more nutritional value for their food dollars. **Page 16**



Food Stamps: First Line

From its earliest days, the Food Stamp Program has been controversial. As the program has grown, so have the issues surrounding it. Today, public scrutiny is greater than ever. While some critics charge the program is out of control, others claim it is too restrictive and not doing the job.

The fact is that the program is doing the job, and it's becoming better managed all the time. To evaluate and understand today's Food Stamp Program, let's look at some common perceptions and then explore the facts.

Myth: Participation has dropped sharply

Fact: Participation has risen to new high

Average monthly participation in the 50 states has *grown* nearly 12 percent: from 19.3 million in 1980 to an estimated 21.5 million people this year. Monthly participation hit a new record high in February 1983 when the number of participants peaked at 22.2 million. Food stamps now reach one in every 10 Americans.

Myth: Program dollars have declined

Fact: Program dollars have grown

Food stamp expenditures have increased more than 42 percent in the past 3 years. In 1980, total costs for the 50 states were \$8.3 billion. This year the program is expected to cost approximately \$12 billion, not including expenditures for Puerto Rico, which began providing food stamp benefits in cash a year ago.

Myth: Food stamp purchasing power has declined

Fact: Average benefits have risen faster than inflation

While the cost of food purchased for home consumption has risen 20 percent since 1980, average monthly food stamp benefits have risen 24 percent. Three years ago, the average monthly benefit was \$34.35 per person. This year the average monthly benefit is about \$42.75 per person.

Since food stamp benefits are tied to household income, benefits for the very neediest participants are substantially greater than those for participants with higher incomes. Currently, a family of four with no income after deductions gets \$253 in food stamps each month. That's \$63.25 per person. In 1980, the maximum benefit for a family of four was \$209 per month, or \$52.25 per person.

(Food stamp allotments are scheduled to increase on October 1, 1983).

Myth: Recent rule changes have unfairly hurt the needy

Fact: Food stamp rules provide special protection for neediest participants

Food stamp rules still strive to distribute benefits equitably. Food stamp rules are uniform nationally, so needy people have the same opportunity to get help regardless of where they live.

In recent years, better targeting of program benefits has meant greater benefits to recipients who have the fewest resources and who are unable to work. Conversely, new rules are tougher on able-bodied students and strikers, as well as people who quit their jobs. Currently, only 80,000 students nationwide receive food stamps—less than half of one percent of the total case-load. These students are almost all disabled persons or parents who are working or single. Strikers are no longer eligible for food stamps unless they were already eligible for or receiving food stamps when they went on strike.

Studies have shown that the people who are getting food stamps are truly needy. One in every four food



One in every four food stamp households has at least one person who is elderly, blind, or disabled. Nearly half of all recipients are children.

Defense Against Hunger



While the cost of food purchased for home consumption has risen 20 percent since 1980, average monthly food stamp benefits have risen 24 percent. Three years ago, the average monthly benefit was \$34.35 per person. Today it is about \$42.75 per person.

stamp households has at least one person who is elderly, blind, or disabled. Nearly half of all recipients are children under 18. Approximately 14 percent are single parents who are heads of households.

Built into the Food Stamp Program are special provisions, including several new rules, that make it particularly responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable groups—the elderly, the disabled, the homeless and destitute. These special provisions make it easier for these recipients to qualify for food stamps, and in many cases, to get increased benefits. For example:

Special consideration during the application process. Special consideration is extended to the disabled, the elderly, and to destitute households to help them apply for food stamps.

Destitute applicants, who have less than \$150 in gross monthly income and no more than \$100 in liquid resources, are entitled to expedited service, which means their applications receive priority handling. In expedited cases, needy families receive their food stamps within 5 days from the date of application.

Homeless applicants need not have a fixed address nor cooking facilities when they apply for benefits.

Elderly and disabled people who have difficulty getting around can ask the food stamp office to arrange a home or telephone interview. In many cases the stamps can then be issued by mail. Or, elderly and disabled people may name an authorized representative who can handle the complete food stamp application process for them—including applying for stamps, going for the interview, picking up the stamps, and shopping for food.

Special rules help many elderly persons apply for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits and food stamps at the same time, so they need not make an additional trip to the food stamp office.

Differences in eligibility rules. There are special income criteria used for households with elderly or disabled people.

Households without elderly or disabled people must meet income criteria based on both the household's gross income (before deductions) and their net income (after deductions). If their gross income is more than 30 percent above the official poverty line or their net income is above the poverty line, they are not eligible.

Households with elderly or disabled people qualify on the basis of net income, after deductions have been subtracted from gross income. No matter what their gross income is, if they meet the program's net income standards as well as other financial and nonfinancial criteria, they are eligible.

In addition, there are several other differences in eligibility rules. For example, households of two or more persons, one of whom is at least 60 years old, may have up to \$3,000 in assets. All other households are allowed \$1,500.

Households with elderly or disabled members may be certified for food stamps for 1 year. Other households are certified more frequently. Households with elderly or disabled members are also exempt from monthly reporting requirements.

Thanks to a recent rule change, some elderly and disabled recipients may now qualify for food stamps as separate households, even if they are living with other people. Usually, participants who live together must be considered one economic unit and count their resources and income together. The new rule has helped many disabled and elderly people become eligible for the first time or, if they were already receiving stamps, has increased their benefits.

Since January 1983, many of the special provisions for the elderly and disabled have been extended to include disabled veterans and their disabled survivors. Previously, veterans could not technically qualify as disabled under the Food Stamp Program because the source of their disability payments was the Veterans Administration, not the Social Security Administration.

Differences in how food stamp may be spent. Most food stamp households cannot use food

stamps to buy prepared meals or carry-out foods. Elderly and SSI recipients, however, can use food stamps to purchase meals from nonprofit meal delivery services or at communal dining facilities and authorized restaurants.

All of these provisions respond to the unique situations facing elderly and handicapped people when they are in need of assistance.

Myth: Fraud, waste, and abuse are rampant in the Food Stamp Program

Fact: Anti-fraud efforts are getting results

There are three major areas where fraud, waste, and abuse can occur: in certification, in issuance, and in a third area that includes counterfeiting, vendor fraud, and food stamp trafficking. USDA is more active than ever in fighting fraud, waste, and abuse in all three areas. To keep food stamp benefits where they belong—with needy families—the Department has stiffened penalties for violators and strengthened program management in several ways.

USDA is also actively encouraging states to share information and work together on anti-fraud efforts. This March, the Department launched Operation Awareness, a nationwide campaign designed to facilitate the exchange of ideas, information, and expertise. (See article on page 12.) As part of Operation Awareness, \$70,000 is being set aside for state managers to travel to other parts of the country to share their technical expertise in particular areas of program management.

Here are highlights of some recent initiatives that are getting results:

■ **Stiffer penalties for recipient fraud.** Contrary to public opinion, the extent of recipient fraud is not widespread. Nevertheless, recipients who conceal or withhold facts or intentionally make false or misleading statements now face the loss of benefits for extended periods. For the first offense, the penalty is 6 months off the program. For the second, the recipient is barred from the program for 1 year. For the third offense, the penalty is permanent disqualification.

■ **Computer wage matching.** One of the major problems in food stamp certification is that some applicants inaccurately report their earnings in order to qualify. Since January of this year, states have been required to compare the income people report on their food stamp applications against wage information provided by the Social Security Administration and unemployment compensation records. Wage matching helps caseworkers determine eligibility, deters incorrect reporting of income, and ultimately saves millions of dollars by reducing losses stemming from certification errors.

■ **Photo identification cards.** USDA has also begun requiring states to use photo identification systems in all food stamp project areas with 100,000 or more participants. Seventeen metropolitan areas are now using photo ID's or similar systems. The photo ID system prevents ineligible people from obtaining food stamps illegally and discourages eligible people from attempting to get a double allotment of food stamps by reporting their authorization-to-participate (ATP) cards as lost or stolen.

■ **Tighter rules on duplicate issuances.** There are new tighter rules on replacing lost, stolen, or destroyed food stamps and ATP cards; and security over stamps issued through the mail is being increased. As a result, the number of food stamps lost through the mail is expected to decline by 6 percent, in spite of a 24 percent increase in the number of stamps issued by mail. Tighter rules on replacing ATP cards are expected to decrease the number of requests for replacement cards by 17 percent.

■ **Increased support for state efforts.** To support states' anti-fraud efforts, USDA has increased administrative funding for investigations, prosecutions, and fraud hearings from 50 percent to 75 percent. As a further incentive, the Department allows states to keep 50 percent of all the fraud claims they collect as well as 25 percent of what they collect for nonfraud claims involving recipient error.

All but a few states have applied for and are getting 75 percent funding for fraud investigations, and nearly half are getting the special

funding for prosecutions. Since 1981, investigations have increased 170 percent. The number of people disqualified as a result of prosecution for fraud is up 300 percent—from 705 in 1981 to 3,241 last year.

Collections increased 61 percent between 1981 and 1982. In all, states established \$13 million in fraud claims against recipients. When recipients are found to have obtained benefits fraudulently, they must either pay back the dollar value of the stamps they wrongfully obtained, or the state can reduce the household's benefits until the previous overpayments have been recouped. States may also recover overissuances from nonfraud claims the same way.

New tools for combatting vendor fraud, counterfeiting, and food stamp trafficking are also getting results:

■ **Stiffer penalties for violators.** Retailers who try to cheat the program are a tiny minority. But those who get caught this year face tough new penalties. A retailer who violates program rules may receive a criminal penalty, up to a \$10,000 fine, or be barred from the program.

Stores caught trafficking in food stamps, that is, buying stamps for cash discount, will be permanently barred from the program for their first violation. Stores that violate the rules by selling nonfood items, such as cigarettes and alcoholic beverages, can be barred from accepting food stamps for 6 months to 5 years for a first violation, 1 to 10 years for a second violation, and may be permanently disqualified for a third violation.

Investigations of stores suspected of violations reached record highs during the past 2 years. In 1982, FNS field offices investigated 5,455 stores suspected of food stamp violations. Of these, about 3,164, or slightly over 1 percent of all participating stores, disclosed evidence of violations. Some 1,804 firms were disqualified from accepting food stamps because of serious violations.

■ **Fast detection of fraudulent redemptions.** To make sure stores do not continue to accept food stamps after they've been disqualified, USDA has a new system called Fast Fraudulent Redemption Identification. Nicknamed "Fast FREDI," the system is comprised of new,

Special Provisions for the Elderly and Disabled

The Food Stamp Program has several special provisions to help the elderly and disabled. Among them are:

Special income criteria

Households with elderly or disabled people qualify on the basis of net income, after deductions have been subtracted from gross income. Other households must meet income criteria based on the household's gross income (before deductions) as well as the household's net income.

Certification up to 1 year

Households with elderly or disabled members may be certified for food stamps for 1 year. Other households are usually certified more frequently.

Joint processing

Many elderly and disabled people may apply for food stamps at local social security offices at the time they apply for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits. Joint processing is limited to persons who live in households in which all members are receiving or applying for SSI.

Mail certification and issuance services

Elderly and disabled people who have difficulty getting around can ask the food stamp office to arrange a home or telephone interview. In many cases, the stamps can then be issued by mail.

Use of authorized representatives

Elderly and disabled people may name an authorized representative who can handle the complete food stamp application process for them. This includes applying for stamps, going for the interview, picking up the stamps, and shopping for food.

Medical deductions

If a household has at least one person who (a) is age 60 or older, or (b) receives SSI benefits or disability payments under the Social Security Act, the household may deduct all medical expenses that exceed \$35 a month for its elderly or disabled members. Deductions are made from the household's adjusted (net) income.

Shelter deductions

Households with elderly or disabled persons may deduct all shelter costs over 50 percent of the household's adjusted income.

Higher allowable assets

Food stamp rules allow households of two or more persons, one of whom is 60 years old or older, to have up to \$3,000 in assets. All other households are currently allowed \$1,500.

Dependent care

Food stamp households may deduct up to \$115 per month for the care of an elderly or disabled person when such care enables someone in the household to accept or continue work, or to take part in training or education preparatory to employment.



In recent years, better targeting of program benefits has meant greater benefits to recipients who have the fewest resources and who are unable to work.

highly sophisticated computerized scanning equipment that detects redemption attempts by firms that no longer have authority to accept food stamps. FNS field office personnel can then quickly investigate the retailers involved.

Improved monitoring of banks and stores. USDA and the Federal Reserve Banks have been working on a new system to monitor more closely the billions of dollars in food stamps as they travel from grocery stores to commercial banks and then to the Federal Reserve to be destroyed.

The new monitoring system, which includes new regulations governing the handling of food stamps by grocers and bankers, is intended to prevent banks from paying cash in exchange for coupons obtained illegally. The system will give investigators the information they need to pinpoint quickly any stores or banks that are improperly redeeming food stamps. The system was tested for a year in Georgia, where it helped officials determine that some banks had redeemed a significant amount of food stamps without proper documentation. Documentation by banks improved dramatically as a result of the test.

One major benefit of the new enhanced monitoring system is that it will drive down the black market value of food stamps. The only way for organized crime, or other large illegal operators, to obtain full value for food stamps is to launder them through commercial banks who redeem them through the Federal Reserve. The new system tracks coupon deposits down to the grocer, providing a clear trail for criminal investigations.

These measures reflect USDA's firm commitment to deter potential abusers and safeguard food stamp dollars for the people who need them. By rooting out the violators, USDA also protects the businesses and reputations of honest retailers.

Virgil Conrad Talks About Coming Initiatives

The facts show that today's Food Stamp Program is stronger than ever. Recent changes have gone a

long way toward targeting program benefits to the needy, improving accountability, and simplifying program administration. And along the way, progress has been made in dispelling some of the myths that have haunted the program's public image.

There are still some lingering misconceptions. In spite of studies that show that food stamp recipients spend their benefits carefully and are getting more nutrients dollar for dollar than the average American, there remains a popular belief that food stamp recipients have a penchant for junk food and expensive steaks.

Virgil Conrad, who administers the program nationally for USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), reflects on this image problem:

"It's rather ironic," he says, "that one of the initial goals of the program was to eliminate the negative association of going with a flour sack in your hand and getting commodities and taking those home. We wanted to take away the dehumanizing aspect of getting food help. Americans deserve better than that."

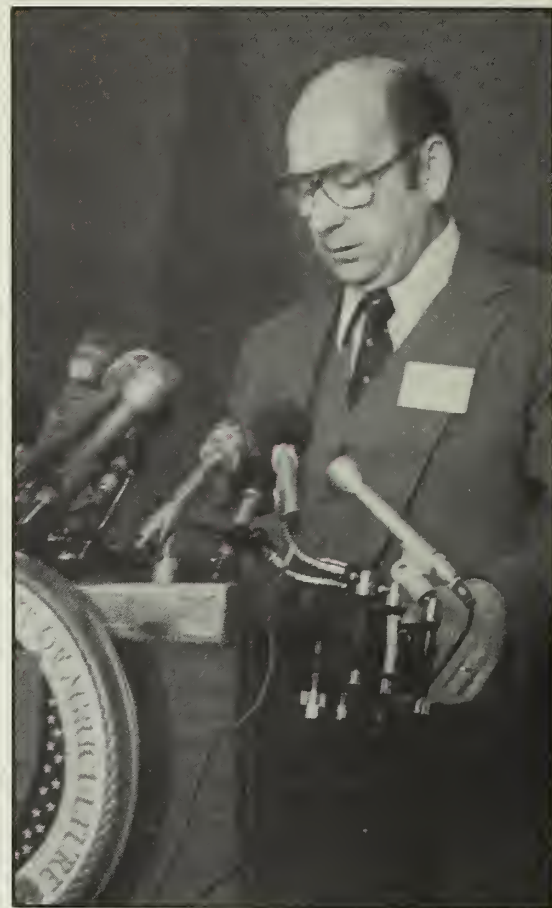
Sadly, Conrad says, almost 20 years later, many food stamp recipients face public scrutiny in the checkout line when they make their food purchases. It's an emotionally charged issue that is yet to be solved.

And yet, Conrad says, once the public gets beyond these emotionally evoked responses, there is great support for the Food Stamp Program—as evidenced by the taxpayers' willingness to fund the program. "So it is a very positive program," he says, "and I think, for the most part, perceived that way."

Looks ahead to more improvements

It's Conrad's intention to continue strengthening program administration and to address those areas that remain points of dissatisfaction—both to program managers and to the American public. What are some of those areas?

Recipients and grocers who defraud the program—although few in number—have always had a great impact on the program's image as poorly managed and overrun with cheaters. The solution? Increase the penalties for cheating so you begin to see a deterrent effect, says Conrad. New rules have recently taken effect that remove wrongdoers from



At a national conference hosted by USDA in May, Virgil Conrad talked with state managers about current efforts to strengthen the program. Pilot projects are underway in several states.

the rolls quickly—and sometimes permanently.

"On the face of it, these appear to be rather harsh penalties," he says. "But they are trying to admonish both the participant and the retailer that this is a very serious program and that improper behavior will not be condoned."

Emphasis will be placed, in the coming months, on studying ways to "improve the integrity and security of our present coupon," Conrad says. That means FNS will be studying better ways to track food stamps from the time they are issued to a recipient to the time they are redeemed—a time when trafficking or counterfeiting may take place.

Today's Food Stamp Program is stronger than ever. Recent changes have gone a long way toward targeting benefits to the needy, improving accountability, and simplifying program administration.

One way to make issuance and redemption more secure may be through implementing an electronic benefits transfer system. Instead of

food stamps, recipients might be issued a card similar to those used with automatic bank teller machines. At the point of food purchase, recipients could present their cards and have their food stamp "account" debited against their monthly allotment. The grocery store, in turn, would automatically receive a credit in the same amount.

The electronic benefits transfer system is a promising alternative, Conrad says, but one that could take at least a decade to put into place nationally. In the meantime, Conrad predicts some changes in the current paper system. Food stamps may be replaced by a special check with the individual's name on it or a micro-encoded number.

Both the paper and bank card systems will be tested this year in demonstration projects. Several other demonstration projects will look at additional ways to reduce errors and tighten management.

"We've selected projects in six states where they are looking into such things as the error prone profile, variable certification periods, case management, verification techniques, and analysis of productivity," says Conrad. "The federal role in all this is to guide the projects so that other states can benefit from the experience."

New Mexico is one of the six states selected to carry out an error reduction demonstration project. The project examines the productivity and cost of verification techniques. A special verification team is focusing on examining error prone cases involving high dollar errors. Cost, case management, and quality control of error rates will be analyzed.

Funding the demonstration projects is a step in the right direction, says Conrad. "We want to show that we are providing more than just coordination and lip service in trying to improve program management."

Reducing errors in certification

The greatest source of dollar losses in the Food Stamp Program is associated with the certification process—the point at which an

applicant's eligibility is determined. Why? According to Conrad, the present system of calculating benefits is just too complex. Caseworkers must struggle to unravel the miles of red tape that make up the rules on how to figure who gets what.

Considering all the complicated calculations they must make, caseworkers may be making the best of a bad situation. After all, Conrad points out, 90 percent of all benefits are going to the right people in the right amounts. The flip side, however, presents a problem. "Nine or ten percent is too much error in this program—that's a billion dollars annually," he says.

With one in every ten food stamp dollars issued in error, something needs to be done. "In today's climate of budget restraint," Conrad says, "every dollar we can avoid misspending is one more dollar we can reallocate to meeting our budget growth—and that the taxpayers do not have to pay out."

As a first step, FNS is considering ways to simplify food stamp certification procedures. Program managers are exploring the possibility of eliminating the complex shelter deduction while protecting average benefits by increasing the standard deduction. Some other possible routes to simpler certification are

making AFDC households (those getting Aid to Families with Dependent Children) automatically eligible for food stamps if they meet the income limit, and simplifying the household definition.

FNS has already established new error rate standards for states. States must reduce their issuance error rates to 9 percent this year, 7 percent next year, and 5 percent in succeeding years. States that exceed their error rate limits will face financial penalties.

According to Conrad, the federal government is spending far too much of the taxpayers' money on erroneous payments. The error rate standards, he says, are simply limits to what the federal government will be financially responsible for in the future.

"The error rate standards can and should be lowered as we move to take the complexity out of the program so that the certification worker can get the job done on the front line," Conrad says.

By stemming this source of loss, administrators can do a great deal to enhance the image of the Food Stamp Program as fair and well-run. It will be worth it to go that extra mile to win public confidence in the program. And, recipients will benefit most of all.



Caseworkers play a crucial role in getting food help to the needy. USDA is looking at a number of ways to simplify certification procedures and speed the application process.

Food Stamps

Food stamps have helped millions of Americans through times of financial and personal crisis. When disability, illness, unemployment, or disaster suddenly cut or permanently reduce a household's income, food stamps are there to make sure people can buy the food they need.

For many elderly and disabled people, food stamps are a permanent source of help and security. For younger participants, eager to be self-supporting, food stamps offer assurance their families won't go hungry during difficult times.

As we see in the following interviews, people turn to food stamps for various reasons. A self-employed handicapped worker in Mississippi uses food stamps to supplement his hard-earned income. A Michigan man turns to food stamps during a temporary period of unemployment. A young mother in Denver gets help for herself and her baby until she can find child care and get back into the workforce. A Seattle woman, having worked all her life, applies for food stamps at age 55 when a disability forces her out of her job.

All share some common feelings about food stamps. The bottom line is: They'd rather not need food stamps at all, but they are glad they're there.

M.D. Dampeer

The calm, unlined face of M.D. Dampeer belies his 50 years and the hardships he has endured.

Dampeer lost his legs when he was 18 years old. He was struck by a car and left paralyzed. Afterwards, he suffered frostbite in both legs, and they had to be amputated. Despite his handicap, however, Dampeer has continued to work.

"Working is better than sitting in the house looking at the walls all day," he says.

For years Dampeer pushed his wheelchair, his only transportation, to his job in downtown Mendenhall, Mississippi. Through all kinds of weather, year-round, he made the 1-mile trip—uphill all the way.

One of the places he passed on his way to work every day was Fay McWilliams' beauty shop. McWil-

liams, touched by Dampeer's determination and his cheerful attitude, enlisted the help of the Rev. J.O. Walker and others in the community and launched a drive to raise money to buy a motorized cart for him. In just 6 weeks, Mendenhall citizens contributed the \$3,000 needed for the purchase, and the cart was presented to Dampeer last Thanksgiving.

"An inspiration to the town"

"M.D. has been an inspiration to the town," says Rev. Walker. "He refused to give up."

"The Food Stamp Program was going on for a long time before I applied for it. As long as I worked at the handicap shop, I was making enough to take care of myself. When that job ended, I had to apply."



Make A Difference

Until three years ago, when the firm went out of business, Dampeer worked for Allied Enterprise Rehabilitation, a company which made wooden items. He then opened up shoeshine stands in the Simpson County Courthouse and a local barber shop where he now alternates his working hours.

Unfortunately, the income from the two stands is less than that from his former job, and although he receives a monthly SSI check, Dampeer began having trouble meeting his expenses. That's when he asked the county welfare director about the possibility of getting food stamps.

Dampeer qualified for the Food Stamp Program in December 1980. He currently receives \$50 in food stamp benefits each month.

"The Food Stamp Program was going on for a long time before I applied for it. As long as I worked at the handicap shop, I was making enough to take care of myself," he says. "When that job ended, I had to apply." He adds that the program is "a good thing for people who need it and qualify," but he deplores people who abuse the program by not telling the truth when they apply.

Plans and cooks his own meals

Since his mother died, Dampeer has lived alone and does all his own cooking. Before his accident, he was a short-order cook, and he proudly says, "I don't need any help cooking."

He also does all his own grocery shopping and meal planning. To make his food stamp benefits stretch further, he buys such items as pinto beans and neckbones or other cheap cuts of meat.

Although his kitchen is not equipped to accommodate his handicap, Dampeer manages. He keeps most items he uses in the lower cabinets; if he needs something out of his reach, he "takes a stick and rakes it down."

M.D. Dampeer is an independent man who likes doing things for himself—and he's proud to be that way.

*article and photos
by Brenda Schuler*

Richard Ward

Richard Ward was 22 when he moved from his native Oklahoma to Kalamazoo, Michigan, in 1965. He held a good, steady job, working as a loader in the shipping and receiving department at the Fisher Body Division of General Motors in Kalamazoo for 10 years. Then, in February 1980, he was laid off.

By October 1980, his unemployment benefits had run out and he turned to the Kalamazoo County Department of Social Services for help. At that time, he was eligible for general assistance benefits, and in early 1981, he qualified for food stamps.

Divorced 4 years ago but recently remarried, Ward lives in a rented home with his new wife, his 15-year old daughter, and his stepdaughter. His older daughter lives with his ex-wife.

"There are four of us living on \$600 a month, and out of that there's \$250 we pay in rent and then utilities, clothing and food," he explains. That \$600 includes \$100 a month in food stamps and his wife's unemployment benefits, which are soon scheduled to run out.

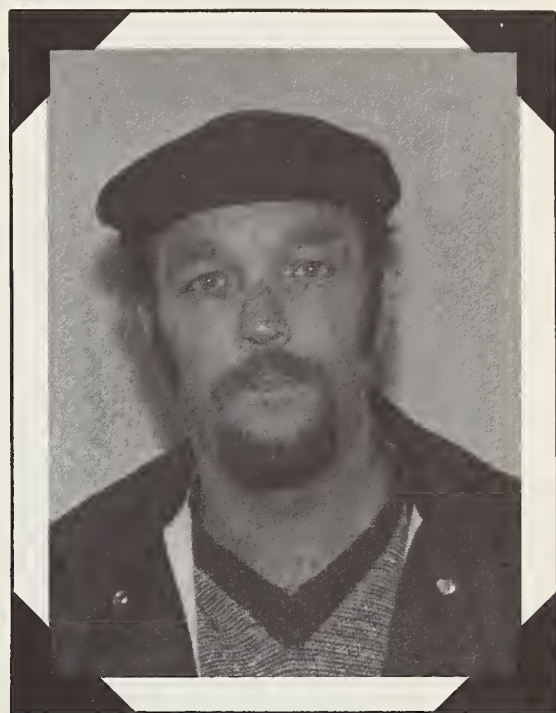
"When you have two teenagers, food just does not last," he adds. "Of course, we buy a lot of generic brand foods and try to stock up on canned foods and things like that. We try to manage very carefully."

Except for a few sporadic odd jobs, Ward, now 40, has been basically unemployed for more than 3 years. His pride has been hurt, but his resilience is strong and he's confident things will improve soon.

Food stamps have helped

"This is the first time in my life I've ever asked for any assistance because I've always been able to find work, mowing yards or cutting down trees. I didn't like asking for assistance, and I still don't, but a man has to do what he has to do to survive."

Ward has found it difficult at times to shop with food stamps. "It's humiliating when you go up to the



“ This is the first time in my life I've ever asked for assistance because I've always been able to find work, mowing yards or cutting down trees. I didn't like asking for assistance, and I still don't, but a man has to do what he has to do to survive. ”

checkout counter and you see people there you have worked with, and they say, 'What are you doing?'

" 'I'm laid off,' you say, and then, when you go pay for your groceries with food stamps, they ask, 'You go on welfare or what?' And they're still working and ask, 'Why don't you go out and find a job?' Well, I don't think there are too many places in this town that don't have my resume or application," he adds.

Without government assistance such as food stamps, he says, "I don't have the slightest idea what I'd do. What can I say? I could have turned to crime. But I am grateful to the State of Michigan and to the government. They do help. People don't like to get assistance, they really don't. The people I know, they'd rather be working."

With all the financial pressures and disappointments of the past 3 years, Ward is still hopeful. "GM is calling back, and eventually they'll call me back," he says confidently. "I have 10 years of seniority and call back rights. I could've given all that up and moved to another state, but this is my home."

Things are looking up

Across town, Sarah Sykes is busily preparing to go to work. Sykes had been called back in early March to her job as a GM press operator, a position she had held for 8 years until she was laid off in August 1982.

"I applied for food stamps after

my unemployment benefits ran out in December," she says. "There are five of us in the household and we got \$37 in food stamps in January. They really helped."

"While I was unemployed, we began eating more things like vegetable soups and beans," she says. "My income was so irregular with me not working that when I did get money, I sat down and made a list of everything I needed before I went to the store. I shopped for food once every 2 weeks."

Sykes receives child support payments for her three children and \$93 a month for her niece, for whom she is a legal guardian. With that income, she qualified for \$37 in food

stamps again in February. In March, when she returned to work and her income increased, her food stamp benefits were discontinued.

Like Richard Ward, Sykes had moved to Kalamazoo in 1965, from Mississippi. Her 8 months of unemployment were difficult for her and her family, but the situation has improved.

"I'm really glad to be back at work," she says. "Now I'm looking forward instead of being at a standstill, and that counts for a lot. I'd rather be working."

*article and photo
by Victor Omelczenko*

Nori and Janel Wright



Living in a buffet apartment measuring scarcely 150 square feet, Nori Wright and her 9-month-old daughter Janel are learning about the welfare system.

Until she left to have her baby, Wright was working for a Denver, Colorado, dry cleaning firm. Before moving to Denver, she did secretarial and switchboard work. She's used to standing on her own feet.

But until she can find a way to get back into the workplace, Wright is dependent on a monthly allotment of \$228 in food stamps, \$252 from Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), and a monthly food package from the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP).

Her existence is certainly not one to inspire remaining in the system any longer than necessary. Each month, \$200 goes for rent on the barren room containing her bed, a crib, two chairs, a small chest of drawers topped by a tiny TV set, a hotel-type desk, and an old refrigerator. In an adjoining 4- by 4-foot kitchen alcove is a sink, pink-painted wooden shelves, and a small gas range. The desk serves as her only table.

Wright has no phone, no car, and no easy escape from her four walls. Her only diversions and adult conversations come from television, a parenting class at Emily Griffith Opportunity School, a local Bible group, a weekly visit from a student nurse, and two or three visits a month from Princess McClain, a community worker offering nutrition guidance. McClain is an aide with

the Cooperative Extension Service's Expanded Food and Nutrition Program (EFNEP).

Balanced diet makes a difference

McClain has just begun teaching Wright how to stretch her food dollars, how to interpret unit prices, and how to extend the basic foods she gets each month from the CSFP.

With little experience in food preparation and sketchy nutritional knowledge, Wright has much to learn over the next 18 months. However, she says that McClain has already helped her realize that a balanced diet and eating regularly actually help give her stamina to keep up with her growing youngster. Wright doesn't feel as run down as she used to.

"I'm lucky," she says, "The baby likes just about everything I give her." In addition to formula and baby foods, Wright is gradually introducing Janel to other foods. "I'm trying to give her some regular foods," she says. "What I fix for myself, we often both eat."

Wright hopes to move into a housing center with on-site day care once space is available. Her first aim is to find a part-time job so Janel can adjust to being with strangers. She's already worrying about how she can make ends meet during that transition period. "Janel is more used to me," says the 24 year-old mother, "but she's adaptable."

Wright has to be adaptable, too. With McClain's guidance, she's learning to avoid impulse buying. "I know now to think first—or write it down—otherwise, the money's gone before I know it." She's also learned to use the canned chicken and beef in her CSFP package in recipes that stretch the quantity for further savings. Although dependent on a neighbor's rides to do her grocery shopping, she tries to shop at two markets for the best buys, checking their slightly damaged bins for marked down items.

McClain is learning from the relationship, too. "At first," she says, "I was terribly depressed. This young woman has so little. But," she smiles thoughtfully, "I think she's going to make it."

In the meantime, Wright is grateful for the help she and her child are getting.

article and photo by Joanne Widner



Eulah Thomas

Eulah M. Thomas' cupboard is so well stocked and organized that it would make a supermarket manager proud. In the pantry behind the kitchen of her small one-bedroom Seattle home are three closets full of canned foods and dry milk, all stored in meticulous order.

How can an SSI recipient living on \$330 a month in cash and \$30 in food stamps have such a well-stocked larder? It takes work and

planning. "I can't always buy the cut of meat I'd like and there are times I get tired of eating some of the same things, but I get by pretty well," says Thomas.

Thomas, who is 66, has been receiving food stamps since 1974 when, as she put it, the welfare department "took her by both arms and dragged her onto the SSI and food stamp programs." Up until then, she had held a job as an underwriter and accountant for an insurance company. When a severe case of degenerative arthritis made

it impossible for her to continue to work, the Seattle welfare department convinced her to overcome her pride and apply for food stamps.

A careful budgeter

Thomas has a number of strategies to stretch her limited budget. Her medical expenses are covered by Medicare and Medicaid. Fortunately, she was able to purchase her home in 1963 so her mortgage payment is only around \$70 per month. However, she really pinches pennies to keep her utility costs down.

"I watch everything," she says. "I make sure every light I'm not using is turned off, I use 50 watt bulbs instead of 100 watt bulbs, and I'm especially careful to make sure the oven is turned off as soon as I'm through using it."

"I can't go to the store often because of my disability, so I try to buy and cook large cuts of meat, like roasts. It's much cheaper that way... I also try to buy generic brands of food rather than the more expensive name brands."

Sticking to a budget is a problem almost everyone has. For food stamp recipients, with very limited resources, sticking to a budget may be the difference between having or not having food at the end of the month.

For someone living alone, preparing food at low cost can be a problem. Food prepared in large quantities often goes to waste. Buying food in small quantities causes less waste but can dramatically increase the unit cost of food purchases. Often people resort to purchasing prepared food, such as TV dinners, to solve these problems, but the cost of prepared food can quickly exhaust a food stamp budget. Eulah Thomas solves this problem by often cooking in quantity, and using some of the tricks of the food processors.

"I cook vegetables in just a little water or I steam them to get all the nutrition I can out of them," says Thomas. "I can't go to the store often because of my disability, so I try to buy and cook large cuts of meat, like roasts. It's much cheaper that way. Then I use aluminum trays, like you get with TV dinners, to make my own individual dinners. I freeze these meals to eat later. By making my meals this way I'm able to save on both food costs and utilities."

Occasionally cooking in large quantities can have other benefits. Thomas is part of a neighborhood in the old sense of the word. Neighbors drop in on each other, watch out for each other's homes and just plain help out.

"If I make a large pot of soup I'll share it with my friends," says Thomas. "When they make something like custard or pies or homemade bread, they'll share some with me."

Looks for special buys

As much as possible, Thomas tries to buy in bulk and shop at sales. She buys especially large sizes of kitchen staples to reduce their unit cost.

"I try to put aside a few pennies every month so I can take advantage of sales," she says. "I especially try to shop for sales of canned foods that are in season. When the canneries are in full swing processing tomatoes or beans, you can often get such good deals on these canned goods that they last you months."

Besides watching sales, Thomas also keeps a file of "cents-off" coupons that help trim her grocery bill.

"I also try to buy generic brands of food rather than the more expensive name brands," she adds. "I find their quality to generally be as good as the national brands, and I find that I can save quite a bit on them."

Good planning and the Food Stamp Program help Eulah Thomas live a much better and healthier life.
article and photo by Phil Canuto

Operation

Getting the most out of every dollar spent is the challenge of the 1980's. Not just for families and individuals, but for large and small businesses, universities and schools, cities and towns, and government agencies. Everyone these days is looking for ways to do things better and at less cost.

For managers of the Food Stamp Program, the stakes are high. Only a carefully structured, tightly run program can make sure food stamp benefits get to the people who need them. At the same time, only a tightly run, well-managed program can win the continued public support needed for its survival.

As one of the largest and most visible government efforts, the Food Stamp Program receives a lot of attention. People see its problems in a grocery store, read about them in the newspapers or hear about them on the evening news. It's no surprise then, that there are people who believe that fraud, waste, and abuse is rampant in the program, and that nothing is really being done to control or stop it. That's simply not the case.

The fact is that many federal, state, and local agencies are working hard to correct the problems.



Awareness

For its part, the federal government has passed legislation and written new regulations over the past year that tighten program administration and impose stiffer penalties on participants and grocers who violate the rules. Simultaneously, many state and local agencies have started their own initiatives.

South Carolina and Kentucky, working with USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), are reducing errors in certifying households for food stamps and making recipients more aware of their reporting responsibilities. San Diego has a special fraud prevention program that has heightened recipient and food stamp worker awareness of fraud and fraud detection.

Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, New Mexico, and New York are successfully using sophisticated computer technology to certify households, issue food stamps more efficiently, reduce mail losses, and, in some instances, verify information on assets as well as wages.

These are just a few examples of activities happening throughout the country. The list goes on and on. Simply put, much progress is being made in eliminating fraud, waste, and abuse. Unfortunately, many anti-fraud efforts either go unnoticed or are not communicated widely to people in other areas who might use them as models in solving similar problems of their own.

FNS is trying to change this situation with a new project it calls "Operation Awareness." It is a joint effort by federal, state, and local governments to improve the integrity of the Food Stamp Program. It has three major objectives: to communicate information about promising or successful activities to combat fraud, waste, and abuse; to coordinate new initiatives that strengthen program administration at all levels of government; and to encourage other federal and state agencies, as well as pertinent non-government organizations, to support and continue improvement efforts.

Sharing ideas and information

A major part of Operation Awareness focuses on its first objective. It involves setting up a communication network that allows agencies and organizations to share innovative or successful techniques for eliminating fraud, waste, and abuse. Many of these efforts are simple, cost-effective, and could be readily adopted.

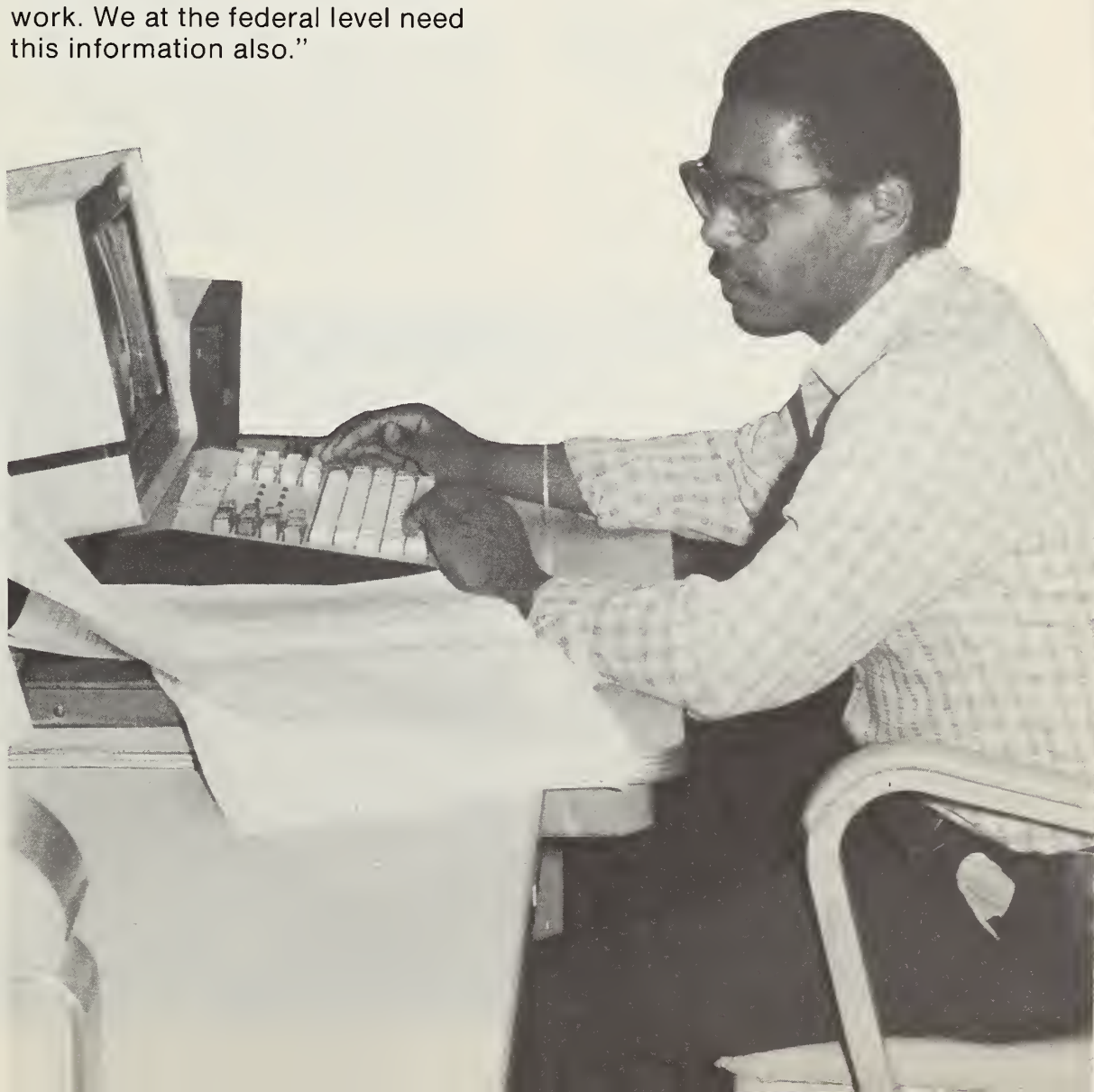
"We need to emphasize the activities currently being undertaken by all parties, whether they are at the federal, state, or local levels," says Virgil Conrad, Deputy Administrator for Family Nutrition Programs for FNS.

"We want to ensure that information about effective projects is made available to all who need it," Conrad says. "Because of the variety of activities taking place across the country, we are setting up initiatives by which we can share what we've learned from each other. Each state needs to know how others have attacked fraud and which methods work. We at the federal level need this information also."

FNS plans to enact several initiatives this year in support of Operation Awareness. Included among them is a "State Exchange Project," which will provide \$70,000 for state and local administrators to travel to other parts of the country, exchange information, and develop the expertise needed to reduce errors in their programs.

Another initiative calls for FNS to make more of its personnel available to work with state and local administrators through workshops and conferences on fraud, waste, and abuse sponsored by FNS regional and field offices. These workshops provide an occasion for all parties to compare notes on planned strategies and ongoing efforts to combat fraud.

"Conferences and workshops provide ideal opportunities to share information," Conrad explains. "They put states with similar problems in touch with each other. We want to build on these conferences to set up a national network. States



New sophisticated computer equipment is making it easier and faster for states to verify information on applicants' wages.

July 1983

will then have access to the experiences of states not only in their region but also throughout the country."

As part of Operation Awareness, FNS convened a national conference of state welfare commissioners May 10-11 in Washington, D.C. to look at successful techniques to improve program management. About 100 people, including representatives from 40 states, attended the conference. Representatives from USDA's Office of the Inspector General and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services also attended.

Conference participants listened to keynote speeches by Secretary of Agriculture John R. Block, Assistant Secretary for Food and Consumer Services Mary Jarratt, and FNS Administrator Robert E. Leard. There were panel discussions by experts on several topics including issuance technology, computer-matching, fraud control, mail losses, and administrative accountability. Secretary Block also awarded certificates of appreciation to five states for outstanding effort in combating fraud, waste and abuse problems: New Jersey, Michigan, Nevada, Texas, and South Carolina.

This conference was preceded by similar meetings and workshops the FNS regional offices coordinated throughout the country.

Encouraging new initiatives

Sharing information and technical assistance is not the only intent of Operation Awareness, however. Another objective is to keep the momentum rolling, to seek the support and commitment from state and local governments to develop new anti-fraud, waste, and abuse initiatives.

One tool FNS is using to do this is a new series of publications titled "State to State." The publications report highlights of successful efforts from around the country to reduce errors in certifying households for food stamps, to find better

ways to issue food stamps, and to collect money lost through fraud.

FNS publishes these reports periodically, depending on the amount of information it receives from state and local agencies. Each publication lists names and phone numbers for people to use to contact experts for additional information about a special project. By publicizing these efforts, FNS hopes to inspire new initiatives. How successful will this be? FNS officials stress that much will depend on state and local input and cooperation.

"In the past months we have all witnessed a number of instances where federal, state, and local efforts have effectively increased the integrity of the Food Stamp Program," says Conrad. "I hope we will have even more success in the future as we continue and intensify our efforts."

"We want to recognize these efforts in 'State to State.' We hope other agencies will be able to incorporate some of these initiatives into their own programs, and keep us informed about any new initiatives they take on to keep the momentum going and build from what we've already learned."

"State to State," conferences, and workshops are supplemented by another initiative to acknowledge and encourage achievements under Operation Awareness. FNS has compiled a comprehensive catalogue of federal, state, and local activities to improve the Food Stamp Program. This catalogue, which

covers certification, issuance, claims collections, coupon control, retailer/wholesaler compliance, and other topics, will be distributed to state agencies through FNS regional offices. The catalogue was first distributed at the FNS national workshop in May.

Examples of some of the activities listed in the catalogue include:

- San Diego has a Fraud Prevention Program, which is designed to prevent fraudulent applications and to identify fraud activity in the program. Special notices about client responsibility and fraud detection activities are periodically given to clients, and fraud prevention posters are placed in welfare offices and in interview rooms.

Eligibility workers are also encouraged to consult investigators about any fraud suspicions. Between January and June 1982, 1,860 cases were referred for investigation, resulting in savings of \$375,047. Thirty-eight percent of the cases were found to be fraudulent.

- Fraud hotlines in Idaho and Kansas have been established, which citizens can use to report abuses. Several fraud investigations have begun as a result.

- Mail initiatives in Iowa, Kansas, and Utah, with the assistance of the FNS regional offices, are cutting mail losses. These areas now make wider use of certified mail in issuing food stamps, and some are also using improved tracking procedures.

- Michigan uses computer tech-



Secretary Block presented awards to five states at the national conference this spring: Michigan, Nevada, New Jersey, South Carolina, and Texas. Among the state officials accepting the awards were: Leland Hall of Michigan (left), John Crosscope of South Carolina (center), Marlin Johnston of Texas (right), and Jerry Powell of New Jersey (not pictured).

nology to reduce duplicate issuances of food stamps. Recipients are given a plastic card embossed with the household's name and case number. The card automatically checks eligibility, generates authorization sheets, and posts the transaction in a host computer. Cost savings for the system's first year of operation (September 1981 to September 1982) amounted to over \$2 million.

- In Philadelphia, the District Attorney's Welfare Fraud Unit has developed a new system that includes several innovations and has streamlined fraud prosecution. Since 1981, Philadelphia has recovered \$525,241 from food stamp recipients who obtained benefits fraudulently.

Getting the message out

Exchange of helpful information and coordination of new anti-fraud initiatives are the primary reasons for Operation Awareness. A secondary, but certainly no less important goal, is to tell specific audiences about the project—what it is and what it is accomplishing. Law enforcement officials, the news media, as well as the general public need to know what government, at all levels, is doing about fraud, waste, and abuse problems. This is essential if would-be cheaters are to be discouraged, and if public confidence in the Food Stamp Program is to be restored.

This last point is emphasized

“The Food Stamp Program is of critical importance to needy and elderly Americans... Never before has cooperation between federal and state governments been so vital to the integrity of the program.”

—Robert E. Leard, Administrator,
Food and Nutrition Service
Downington, Pa., April 21, 1983



by FNS Administrator Robert E. Leard. “We must communicate our anti-fraud waste and abuse efforts. And when I say *our*, I mean all of us,” Leard says. “We need to tell the public that we are getting the Food Stamp Program under control by rooting out fraud, waste, and abuse, and by tightening administration.”

To help get the word out about Operation Awareness, last spring FNS began distributing press packets about the project to the media, and to various state and local agencies. The packets contain sample news releases, background information, and short feature stories about specific activities related to Operation Awareness that have been happening around the country.

Old perceptions change slowly. Perhaps too slowly with regard to the Food Stamp Program. With a little push and effort, however, popular perceptions of the program can and will change.

For further information on Operation Awareness or to obtain copies of related publications, press packets, etc., contact the nearest FNS regional office servicing your area. Or write:

Operation Awareness
Family Nutrition Programs
Food and Nutrition Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Alexandria, Virginia 22302

*article by Bill Fedyna
photos by Larry Rana
and Paul Rowen*



Making Food

The basics of good nutrition and good shopping are simple: plan ahead, read labels, look for bargains, and eat a variety of nourishing foods every day.

That's a message Isabel Wolf has stated many times during her career in nutrition research and teaching. This year, she'll be taking the message to hundreds of community workers, nutrition educators, and other people interested in helping families—particularly low-income families—get more nutritional value from their food dollars.

Wolf, who is administrator of USDA's Human Nutrition Information Service, is traveling to seven cities throughout the United States this year to hold workshops and make media appearances. The result of these workshops and appearances, she hopes, will be the establishment of local support networks for providing more information on food budgeting and nutrition to area shoppers.

Will reach wide audience

The national food buying education project, called "Making Food Dollars Count," is the joint effort of several USDA agencies, the largest of which are the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), the Human Nutrition Information Service (HNIS), and the Extension Service. The workshops, and the idea behind them, are based on a prototype developed and used by the Food and Nutrition Service's Northeast Regional Office.

While project coordinators are especially eager to reach low-income families, who face the biggest challenge in meal planning and budgeting, they feel other families who want to economize can benefit as well.

"I don't want to paint the picture that people with limited economic resources have major problems or are worse shoppers than people with high incomes," Wolf says. In fact, a USDA study showed that, dollar for dollar, low-income families tend to get more nutrients than people at higher income levels.

"Our overall goal," she says, "is to help shoppers use some demonstrated principles and practices that

will enable them to buy nutritious diets within their food budgets." Another goal is to find new ways to disseminate applied nutrition research material developed by HNIS to people who can use it at the state and local levels.

Uses new meal plans

An important part of the seven workshops is to show participants how to use sample meal plans in counseling low-income shoppers. USDA nutritionists and home economists have developed a new series of sample meal plans and shopping lists based on considerable research. Wolf will be demonstrating how, using the plans, a four-person family can eat for \$58 a week—the current food stamp allotment for that size family.

"The new meal plans, which are the basis for the project, take into account the newest research on nutritional requirements," Wolf explains. "They were based on national surveys of what low-income households actually buy and how much they pay for it."

The plans, for three meals and a snack per day, include 2 weeks' menus, recipes, and food lists. They were tried out during the fall of 1982 by food stamp households with varied racial and ethnic backgrounds. The families shopped for the food on the lists, prepared and ate the meals as suggested, and gave their reactions on the practicality and acceptability of the meal plans.

The families, all of whom live in



Before each workshop, Isabel Wolf shops in a local grocery store using a list prepared in advance.

| Item | Amount to Purchase | Cost |
|---------------------------|---------------------|----------|
| Mixed vegetables | 1 pkg | 53 |
| Green beans | 1 pkg | 53 |
| Peas | 1 pkg | 53 |
| Orange juice, concentrate | 1 12-oz can | 77 |
| Monade, concentrate | 1 6-oz can | 35 |
| nd beef, regular | 1.68 lbs | 2 42 |
| beef or pork | 1 lb | 98 |
| uck roast, | 2 lbs | 3 68 |
| ryer, whole | 2.5 lbs | 2 21 |
| ed Dolly | | |
| rocess | 1 gal and 1/2 gal | 3 80 |
| se, lowfat | 1 12-oz pkg, sliced | 1 95 |
| | 1-lb pkg | 49 |
| | 1 6-oz pkg | 1 72 |
| | 1 doz | 3 88 |
| | 2-lb | 3 88 |
| | 1 doz | 3 88 |
| Total Costs: | | \$ 54.51 |



Dollars Count

the Washington, D.C. area, were able to purchase the food for less than \$58 a week. And, surprisingly, two of the families reported that the meal plans provided more food than they could eat.

But what about regional differences in the cost of food? In each city she visits, Wolf will be able to answer that question with first-hand information. The day or evening before the workshops, Wolf will shop at a local grocery, using the plans.

First workshop in Atlanta

The kick-off of "Making Food Dollars Count" was in Atlanta in March. The day before her workshop there, Wolf shopped at two local grocery stores—one city store and one suburban store. Crews from two national television networks filmed Wolf as she selected the 64 items on her list and explained the buying principles she was applying.

On both trips, there was a tense moment as the cashier rang up the total, but Wolf had succeeded with purchases of \$58.61 at the first store and \$56.90 at the second, including state and local sales tax.

The following day, flanked by a cart filled with the purchases from one of her shopping trips, Wolf introduced the new meal plans to a workshop audience of nutrition professionals and community leaders.

"The plans are examples," she told the group. "They represent one of many ways to meet nutritional requirements and still stay within the food stamp allotment. In fact, USDA can develop much lower-cost food plans, but they would be very monotonous and less like families' food consumption practices and preferences."

The new plans have more cereal, flour, bread, pasta, and dried beans than low-income households ordinarily eat. These foods are low-cost sources of nutrients that are found to be lacking in diets, according to Wolf.

"Meat, a notably good source of iron and zinc as well as other nutrients, is not as prevalent in the sample meal plans as in household diets," she says. "This is because

meat is relatively expensive. Also, the meal plans count on preparing foods at home instead of buying certain commercially prepared entrees and mixtures.

"What we do in the meal plans is a lot of stretching," she adds. "There is a lot of combining meat with less expensive foods, but the protein levels of the meals are more than adequate. In Atlanta, I spent less than \$15 for meat products—that's only about 26 percent of the food budget. This allowed more for buying other foods, such as fruits and vegetables."

The plans do contain desserts, but not soft drinks and costly snacks. Wolf summarizes her overall shopping approach as careful pricing, watching for specials, and relying on purchases of generics and store brands rather than national brands most of the time.

Other resources are available

In addition to her presentation about the meal plans, Wolf talked to Atlanta workshop participants about other resources available to help low-income shoppers. She cited the recent trend toward supermarkets distributing consumer education materials in their stores. Grocer trade associations are also developing such materials for their member stores to distribute. For example, the Food Marketing Institute has printed two pamphlets with shopping tips for food stamp users and the elderly.

In conjunction with the workshop, the Southeast Regional Office of the Food and Nutrition Service assembled displays of local nutrition services and materials, including the Food Marketing Institute materials. Workshop participants each received a folder containing the new USDA meal plans, various USDA publications on thrifty shopping and meal preparation, and a resource guide listing local nutrition services.

Polly Miller, director of the FNS nutrition and technical services staff in Atlanta, says she is already seeing evidence of the multiplier effect of the workshop. Two Georgia colleges are conducting training classes using the "Making the Food Dollars Count" materials. Extension agents

are using the workshop information in their contacts with low-income households, and many families have requested the meal plans and shopping tips as a result of reading or hearing about the workshop. Food editors of Atlanta area newspapers assisted greatly in informing the public of the food buying tips.

Wolf's six other workshops are in Dallas, Chicago, Denver, Boston, San Francisco, and New Brunswick, New Jersey. At each workshop, sample meal plans and other materials will be distributed to participants.

Extension agents throughout the country were provided with copies of the sample meal plans for reproduction at the time of the first workshop in Atlanta. Others who want copies can order them for 50 cents each from the Consumer Information Center, Pueblo, Colorado 81009.

article by Brenda Schuler

photos by Rebecca Skelton



Wolf selects several loaves of whole wheat and enriched white bread.

Sample Grocery List

The day before her first workshop in Atlanta, Isabel Wolf shopped at two grocery stores, one in the city, the other in the suburbs. The following list is what she bought at the first store.

Wolf used a basic list she had prepared in advance, making adjustments as she shopped according to what was available and what were the best buys. She had planned to buy fresh tomatoes, for example, but substituted canned tomatoes because a late spring freeze had caused fresh tomatoes to be very expensive. Chicken, on the other hand, was an excellent buy at 38 cents a pound.

Wolf purchased more of certain items, like flour, potatoes, raisins, dried milk, and peanut butter, than a family might use in one week. She did not buy a few other basics, like sugar, that a family might already have on hand from the week before.



With her shopping almost complete, Wolf looks over her list with Pat Daniels of the Food and

Nutrition Service. The list includes a week's groceries for a family of four.



Item

Amount purchased

Cost

Produce

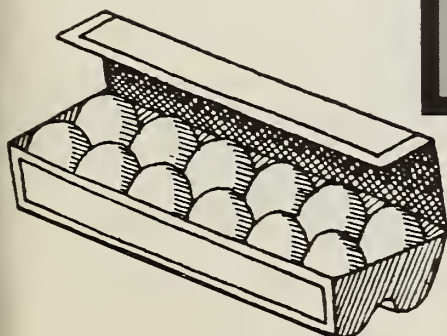
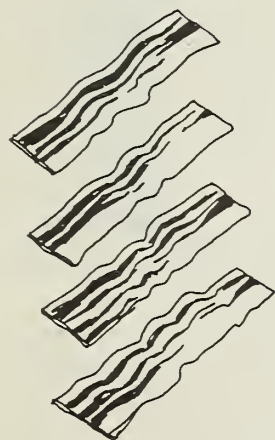
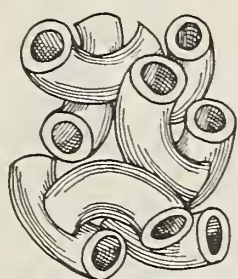
| | | |
|----------|----------------|------|
| Cabbage | 1/2 small head | .29 |
| Carrots | 2-lb. bag | .79 |
| Celery | 1 medium bunch | .59 |
| Lettuce | 1 small head | .79 |
| Onions | 3 lbs. | .69 |
| Potatoes | 5-lb. bag | .99 |
| Apples | 5 medium | .58 |
| Bananas | 4 medium | .24 |
| Oranges | 12 small | 1.00 |
| Pears | 2 medium | .63 |

Canned and Dried

| | | |
|------------------------|-------------------|------|
| Tomatoes | 3 1-lb. cans | 1.37 |
| Tomato puree | 2 10-1/2 oz. cans | .53 |
| Peaches, juice-packed | 1-lb. can | .59 |
| Raisins | 1 box (15 oz.) | 1.79 |
| Tuna fish, chunk-style | 1 can (6-1/2 oz.) | .85 |

Flour, Mixes and Shortening

| | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------|------|
| Flour, enriched | 10-pound bag | 1.54 |
| Gingerbread mix | 1 14-oz. box | 1.09 |
| Cornmeal, whole ground | 2-lb. bag | .79 |
| Fruit-flavored gelatin, dry mix | 3-oz. package | .35 |
| Shortening | 3-lb. can | 1.19 |
| Salt | 26-oz. container | .23 |
| Baking powder | 4-oz. can | 1.25 |



| Item | Amount purchased | Cost |
|---|--------------------------------|----------------|
| Rice, Macaroni and Beans | | |
| Noodles, enriched | 16-oz. package | .59 |
| Macaroni, enriched | 16-oz. package | .59 |
| Rice, regular, enriched | 1-lb. package | .38 |
| Navy beans, dry | 1-lb. package | .29 |
| Cereals | | |
| Shredded wheat | 10-oz. package | 1.09 |
| Cornflakes | 24-oz. package | 1.49 |
| Cookies and Crackers | | |
| Oatmeal cookies | 11-1/2 oz. package | .89 |
| Saltines | 1-lb. package | .49 |
| Bread | | |
| White, enriched | 3 22-oz. loaves | 1.19 |
| Whole wheat | 1-lb. loaf | 1.00 |
| Dressings, Jelly and Peanut Butter | | |
| Vinegar | 1 pint | .44 |
| Jelly | 18-oz. jar | .99 |
| Peanut butter | 18-oz. jar | .99 |
| Dry and Canned Milk | | |
| Nonfat dry milk | Box to make 20 quarts | 5.49 |
| Frozen | | |
| Mixed vegetables | 1 package (2 for \$1.09) | .55 |
| Green beans | 1 package (2 for 99¢) | .50 |
| Peas | 1 package (2 for \$1.09) | .54 |
| Orange juice, concentrate | 1 12-fl. oz. can | .79 |
| Lemonade, concentrate | 1 6-fl. oz. can (6 for \$2.09) | .35 |
| Meat | | |
| Ground beef | 2 lbs. | 2.23 |
| Liver, beef or pork | 1 lb. | 1.13 |
| Beef, bottom round | 3.31 lbs. (@ \$1.89 lb.) | 6.37 |
| Chicken, mixed parts | 4.18 (@ 38¢ lb.) | 1.59 |
| Dairy and Deli | | |
| Milk, lowfat | 1 gal. and 1/2 gal. | 1.79 |
| American process cheese | 16-oz. package, sliced | 1.29 |
| Cottage cheese, lowfat | 12-oz. carton | .69 |
| Bacon, sliced | 1-lb. package | 1.69 |
| Bologna | 16-oz. package | 1.59 |
| Eggs, large | 1 dozen (extra large) | .79 |
| Margarine | 2 sticks | .39 |
| | | <hr/> |
| | | Tax: \$2.26 |
| Total Costs: | | \$58.61 |



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